

Land Revenue Administration in Purnea before 1765

Madaneshwar Mishra

(1) Jurisdiction of Purnea

According to the Fifth Report, Saif Khas was the first and the most famous of the governors of Purnea under the later Mughals. He ruled Purnea almost as a despotic ruler from 1722 to 1752.¹ Just on the eve of Saif Khas's appointment as *faujdar*² or military commander as well as the revenue collector of Purnea, it was bounded on the west by the river Kosi which flowed through a little west of the present Purnea town and proceeding southward fell into the Ganges some where near Karhagala. The northern boundary was some 14 miles from the present town of Purnea which is proved by the existence of a frontier fort and a village called 'Satali' even to this day near Jalalgach. From Jalalgach the boundary ran eastward passing a little north of the junction of the 'Mahananda' and 'Kankai' rivers and then to the south to a point where the present pargana of Suryapur of Purnea bordered the district of Dinajpur.³ Saif Khas after his appointment, extended the jurisdiction of Purnea towards the west by one-third through his conquests of the parganas west of the river Kosi in 1732 and almost an equal area towards the north on the side of Mirang, i.e. on the frontiers of Nepal.⁴ Jurisdiction of Purnea thus covered an area of 5119 square miles,⁵ i.e. a little more than what it was in 1950. The area beyond the river Kosi which was conquered by Saif Khan in 1732 was under the control of Sir Sah and his son and included Parganas Gendwana, Bhawanipur, Bhuagar, Nathipur and Dhapnar and the major portion of this area together was known as pargana Dhanipur and was a part of Bihar under Sarkar

1 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 136.

2 *Proja* = army, *dar* = holder.

3 W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. XV, p. 28.

4 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 136.

5 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 315.

Mraugdyr.⁶ Since Salf Khan's conquest this portion continued to be under the jurisdiction of Purnea. The following table gives an idea of the increase in the area of Purnea in Salf Khan's regime—

Table I
The area of Purnea between 1722 & 1752

<i>Year</i>	<i>Area in square miles</i>	<i>How acquired</i>
1722	1700	Original jurisdiction
1732	1706	Additions made by conquest
1732 to 1752	1707	—do—
Total	5113	

Source—Based on Fifth Report, vol. II, pp. 232 & 365.

Salf Khan served in Purnea till his death under successive viceroys of Murshid Kuli, Shujauddin and Alivardi Khan. After his death, the government was bestowed in rapid succession on Muhammad Abed and Bahadur Khan. After Bahadur Khan's brief administration, Saifad Ahmad Khan (nephew and son-in-law of Alivardi Khan) became the saujdar of Purnea. After his death in 1750, he was succeeded by his son Shantai Jung who after only nine months' rule was killed in a battle with Sirajuddowla at 'Baldinabad' near Manikuri. Between 1757 and 1765 the following saujdars ruled Purnea—

Raj Nekraj Khan, Hozir Ali Khan, Khadim Hossain Khan, Allah Kuli Khan, Sirr Ali Khan, Sepahdar Jang, Raja Suchet Rai and Raziuddin Muhammad Khan.⁷

The area and jurisdiction of Purnea with certain adjustments continued to be as before even under their successive administration. Thus on the eve of Diwan Purnea was constituted of portions of the present states of Bengal and Bihar both.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁷ W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. XV, pp. 222-225.

The following list gives the Pargana-wise division of Purnea separately under Bihar and Bengal in 1765 :-

Pargana	Sarkar	Soba
1. Haveli Purnea		
2. Sripur Dubnaipur		
3. Sahaipur	Purnea	Bengal
4. Katihar		
5. Kadiwa		
6. Aqa		
7. Teera Khurdah		
1. Radaur		
2. Haveli Tajpur		
3. Koiraha		
4. Kusmaripur		
5. Dilawarpur	Tajpur	Bengal
6. Surjapur		
7. Bhaura		
8. Bahadurpur		
9. Desulhi Khawaspur		
1. Gondwara		
2. Bhawanipur		
3. Binagar	Monghyr	Bihar
4. Nathpur		
5. Dhapar		

Source :—Fifth Report, vol. II, pp. 337-338.

Let us now find out the revenue assessment of Purnea in pre-1765 period.

(A) Revenue Assessments

According to Grant's Historical and Comparative Analysis of the Finances of Bengal, the two divisions of Purnea, i.e. Sarkar Purnea and Sarkar Tajpur, were assessed at Rs. 1,60,219 and Rs. 1,62,006 respectively according to Todar Mah's assessment of 1581* and Pargana Dhammapur of Sarkar Monghyr

* Fifth Report, vol. II, Appendix No. 4.

was assessed at Rs. 1,00,000.⁹ The total assessment of these three Sarkar came to Rs. 4,22,515. But since the time of Todar Mal, there have been so many changes in the boundary of the district that any attempt for comparison with his assessment with a later period will only lead to confusion.

Saif Khan, after his appointment as faujdar and amil of Purnea extended his jurisdiction towards the west and added an equal area to his original jurisdiction and further annexed to his territory about the same area by extending the western boundary. Thus the additions made by him were about double the area of his original jurisdiction. In 1722, Purnea was assessed at Rs. 2,30,000. Hunter says that financial reforms made by Murshid Quli Khan were not extended to Purnea. As a frontier military district, the greater portion of its land was assigned as 'jagir' for the maintenance of the faujdar and his troops. During the time of Murshid Quli Khan, the Khakha, under the pargana denotations of Sripur Dalmahar, yielded Rs. 2,70,000 and out of this amount Rs. 1,80,000 was assigned to Saif Khan as a 'vakuf' jagir which was secured by a 'sanad' or grant.¹⁰ Shujauddin Khan, Nawab of Bengal redistributed the lands of Purnea into a revenue-paying portion valued at Rs. 2,14,854 and a jagir portion, valued at Rs. 1,29,374¹¹. He also added some 'abwabs' and the total assessment came to Rs. 5,61,857.¹² It is to be noted that after Todar Mal's assessment, Murshid Quli Khan, the subedar of Bengal was the first to levy additional impositions and this was followed by his successors—Shujauddin Khan, Aliverdi Khan and Mir Kasim.¹³ According to Grant's estimates, the assessment of Purnea in 1757 was Rs. 3,44,200 with an addition of Rs. 3,17,000 as 'abwabs' and thus the total assessment including abwabs was Rs. 6,61,327.¹⁴ Thus 'abwabs' were responsible for about 50 percent of the total gross assessment. He also gives details of the abwabs which were as follows:—

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁰ W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. XV, p. 102.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹² Fifth Report, vol. A, p. 212.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

Table 2

**Alwadar* realised in Purnea in 1757 by the Provincial Government

Type of <i>Alwadar</i>	Amount in Rs.
(1) <i>Khar Navid</i>	—
(2) <i>Zar Mathman</i>	1,511
(3) <i>Pasphary</i>	256
(4) <i>Chowdh Maratha</i>	1,92,451
Total	24,018
	1,11,098

Source : Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 337.

These were the '*alwadar*' levied by Murshidabad Government and many more were levied by the faujdar. Mir Kasim, in about 1760, being pressed for money got the resources of Purnea examined and his gross assessment of Purnea came to Rs. 21,01,415. Out of this sum, Rs. 34,134 was the collection charge to be spent over assistants, languages and mukdams; Rs. 54,071 for the maintenance of frontier garrisons and Rs. 33,805 for state clerical (yearly and daily) and thus after deducting these charges which came to Rs. 1,04,010 the net assessment was at Rs. 1,945,405.¹⁵ The percentage of charges came to 8. Mir Kasim's examination of the resources of Purnea also reveals the large amounts appropriated by the former faujdars of Purnea. Grant says that Mir Kasim completed a regular *Hustul-hul'*¹⁶ and found that Rs. 14,72,845 was the assessed amount.¹⁷ Apart from this, revenues received from market places, taxes, duties and licenses etc. which included '*war duties*'¹⁸ were not transmitted to the provincial treasury in Purnea district, the '*gunj*'¹⁹ of Nawalaganj on the confidence of

15 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 334.

16 What is and what was.

17 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 337.

18 Remitting or all other sources of revenue according to the Government, in addition to the land-tax, from a variety of imports, as customs, transit duties, licenses, fees etc.

19 Market place.

the Mahananda and the Ganges alone yielded a duty of Rs. 1,18,793.²⁰ In 1764 Nand Kumar reduced the net revenue of Purnea as ascertained by Mir Kasim at Rs. 19,45,405 to Rs. 17,88,174 by re-introducing the allowed mulassil charges (cost of collection etc.) and the revenue was fixed at less than what it ought to have been. This is called by Grant 'active chicanery' of the Hindustani financiers who catch themselves by cheating the Government.²¹ In 1763 at the time of the acquisition of Dinari, Rs. 17,88,173 was accepted as the gross revenue assessment of Purnea, Rs. 3,65,637 was the cost of collection and thus the net assessment was Rs. 14,22,536.²²

The following Table shows the gross revenue assessment of Purnea and also the cost of collection and other charges :—

Table 3
Revenue Assessment of Purnea, 1722-1765

Year	Gross assessment in Rs.	Charges including cost of collection in Rs.	Net Assessment in Rs.
1712	2,78,830	1,80,166	98,664
1728	2,78,940	1,80,166	98,774
1739	3,44,208	N.A.	N.A.
1757	6,61,327	N.A.	N.A.
1763	21,09,415	1,64,010	19,45,405
1764	19,45,405	1,57,231	17,88,174
1765	17,88,173	3,65,637	14,22,536

Sources (1) Based on Final Report on Survey and Settlement Operations (Purnea), p. 10 (1904).

(2) Fifth Report, vol. II, pp. 332, 336 & 340.

From the table above, it is clear that the assessment fluctuated heavily

²⁰ Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 236.

²¹ Ibid, pp. 339-340.

²² Ibid.

The following table shows the classification of Punjab assessments into *khata* and *jagir lands*²³ excluding *abwab* levied by the Provincial Government :—

Table 4

Year	Revenue from <i>Khata</i> lands in Rs.	Revenue from <i>Jagir</i> lands in Rs.	Total in Rs.
1722	98,664	1,80,166	2,78,830
1739	2,14,854	1,29,374	3,44,228

Sources : (1) Based on Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 250.

(2) Table No. 3.

It appears that revenue from *jagir* lands was quite substantial.

As has been said, Mirshid Quli stated the levy of *abwab* on the standard assessment. The following statement shows the levy of *abwab* from time to time by the Provincial Viceroy²⁴ :—

Table 5

Gross Assessment and *Abwab* in Punjab

Year	Standard Assessment in Rs.	<i>Abwab</i> in Rs.	Total in Rs.
1722	2,78,830	N. A.	—
1739	3,44,228	2,17,629	5,61,857
1757	3,44,229	3,17,098	6,61,327
1763	—	—	21,09,414

Sources : Based on the Fifth Report, vol. II, pp. 251 and 337.

²³ Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 250.

²⁴ Ibid. pp. 251 & 337.

The preceding three tables indicate that the assessment of Purnea was the lowest in 1772. It is also clear that the levy of *abwabs* or cesses started by Muzhid Qut Khan was increased by Shujaudin Khan in 1739 and further by Aliverdi Khan which increased the *abwab* to Rs. 3,17,046. Nothing can be said definitely about the imposition of *abwabs* by Mir Kadir. His assessment of the hidden sources increased the figure to Rs. 21,00,415, the highest that Purnea was ever assessed. But it is difficult to say what amount of these assessments found their way to the treasury at Murshidabad.

According to Hunter, the powerful military chiefs of Purnea must have opposed 'khasanavi', a fee paid by the zamindars to the officers and the clerks of the treasury which was levied at Rs. 2,973. The second *abwab* was 'tax mathout' which consisted of 'nazar panyah', i.e. presents exacted from landlords at the time of the annual settlements; 'bhai khilat', a fee taken from zamindars for the dresses of honour that the Nawab bestowed on them every year at the time of panyah²⁵; 'panthbandi', a charge for construction of embankments in the vicinity of Murshidabad; and 'rasam nazam', a contribution of 10 annas in every thousand rupees levied by the commander of the treasury guards at Murshidabad on all revenue remittances. The third was the 'faujdar *abwab*'. It was the cause of much ill-feeling between the faujdars of Purnea and the nawabs of Murshidabad. Hunter is of opinion that it was never levied. It was an additional assessment of Rs. 2,83,007 on the revenue portion of the estate which was excoiled northward during the administration of Saif Khan. The 'through muraha' levied by Aliverdi Khan amounting to Rs. 24,018 was never paid by Purnea nawabs.²⁶ The figures of assessment should not lead one to believe that these were all necessarily realised in full by the Murshidabad Government.

After we have got an idea of the assessment of Purnea during the period 1712 to 1763, let us turn to find out what amount the faujdars collected from the district.

25 A ceremony for inaugurating the revenue collection of the year.

26 W. W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, vol. XV, p. 382.

In spite of Saif Khan's conquest after 1722 and extension of the area of jurisdiction towards the west and the north, 'the names, numbers, and values of farms, assessed for the ancient crown rent, underwent no alteration.'²⁷ Saif Khan never submitted any account of the increase in revenue arising out of agricultural improvement or the extension of jurisdiction by conquest.²⁸ He used to realise a sum of rupees eighteen lakhs from the district and this continued even during the succeeding administration of Saiyad Ahmad Khan who ruled Purana upto 1756.²⁹ Only a few akwas were added to the standard assessment.³⁰ The translator of 'Sair-Mutakhirin' says that Saiyad Ahmad Khan collected a sum of Rs. 50,00,000 per year.³¹ He was assured by the writers of Saiyad Ahmad's Treasury about this sum. When Saif Khan conquered pargana Dhamrahar, the established assessment of which was Rs. 1,55,173 no account of it was taken by the Murshidabad Government nor did Saif Khan submit any account of his conquered territory in the north. After Saif Khan's conquest of Dhamrahar a sum of Rs. 40,000 was deducted in the accounts of the Provincial Treasury from the assessment papers of Bihar and nothing was added to Bengal. Mir Kasim's investigations in 1761 conclusively proved that the gross income of Purana was Rs. 21,00,415 and right from Saif Khan to Shaukat Jung, nobody ever paid that sum to the Provincial Treasury.³² In the time of Aliverdi Khan the Province of Purana paid something less than four lakhs of rupees a year.³³ If we accept Raynesford's (translator of Sair Mutakhirin) figures to be correct, huge savings were made by the faujdars of Purana. But even if we discount his figures, there is no doubt that the rental of the Purana faujdars was several times more than the revenue paid by them. The following table gives an

27 F.R. Report, vol. II, p. 334.

28 Ibid, p. 335.

29 Ibid, p. 336.

30 F.R. Report, vol. II, p. 336.

31 Sair-Mutakhirin, vol. II, p. 137 (foot note).

32 F.R. Report, vol. II, p. 337.

33 Letter Copy Book of the Resident at the Durbar at Murshidabad, 1769-1770.

(Enclosure to Becher's Letter, dated the 25th September 1769), p. XXV.

idea of the difference between the revenue assessment and the rental of the Purua faujdar between 1722 and 1757 :—

Table 6

The difference in Revenue and rental of Purua

Year	Revenue assessment in Rs.	Rental in Rs.	Difference in Rs.
1722	2,78,130	10,00,000	15,21,170
1728	2,78,480	10,00,000	15,21,060
1739	5,44,281	10,00,000	14,55,712
1756	3,44,298	10,00,000	14,55,712
1757	6,61,527	10,00,000	11,38,573

Source:—Based on (1) Table No. 3.

(2) *Sair-Motakhori*, vol. II, p. 197 (*first part*).

But if we accept Mir Kasim's figure of Rs. 21,00,000 to be the rental the difference of Rs. 3,00,000 may further be added to the income of the faujdar. After the unequal times of Plaury, it is difficult to say what amount was actually collected by Mir Kasim. Mir Kasim's investigations also revealed that zamindars earned huge income from 'hair duties'. There were several 'gunj' in Purua—Alangunj, Baharajgunj, Dewangunj and others. The income from these was appropriated by the faujdar and no part of it was transmitted to Murshidabad Treasury. Thus apart from the rental 'abwabs' which they might have imposed. We are not taking care of any we have seen, there was a good deal of difference between the revenue assessed and the rent realised.

For the purpose of rent collection, the entire district was divided into parganas or local units. The revenue farmers were appointed by the Bay

that the collection is would be clear from the following remarks of Ghulam Ahmad Khan, the author of *Sub-Munkharin*, who was for several years in the court of Sayyid Ahmad Khan in 1751:

There was a certain *Amir* called *Sirpur*,¹¹ the son of which was sent as a tax collector from *Sirpur* and some thousand *rupees*, and he¹² collected without any apprehension from the tax-payers without any knowledge, the design of obtaining the collection of the revenue *rupees* only.¹³

For the *Qasim* *Hawas* was a governor *Amir* *rupees* a year over and above the *rupees* and *rupees* in *Sub-Munkharin* and the was sent as paid from the Government *rupees* but by the order of the was appointed as *Qasim* *Hawas*.¹⁴ This gives us an idea of the extra collection made from the *rupees* for collection of a revenue of Rs. 30,000 the revenue *rupees* was to get Rs. 1,000 as *Qasim* *Hawas* and *rupees* the *rupees* and *rupees*, over the *rupees* *rupees*. We may well imagine what amount the order *rupees* must have received from the *rupees*. There were hereditary *Amir* in the district but understanding that the district was to be placed out *Amir* *rupees* who collected *rupees* from the *Amir* *rupees* which is indicated from the following account:

He¹⁵ *Amir* as the previous¹⁶ *Amir* in *rupees*, having been for a length of time strictly connected with Government as *Amir* of the district¹⁷ of *Tajpur*¹⁸ *Sirpur*, *Qasim*¹⁹ and *Karnapala*²⁰ in which *Amir* he had acquired both *rupees* and *rupees*. The *Amir* of *rupees* as

- 11 *Sirpur* *Amir* of *Paros*.
- 12 *Sirpur* *Amir* *Amir*, *Amir* of *Paros*.
- 13 *Sub-Munkharin*, vol. I p. 10.
- 14 *Ibid*.
- 15 *Amir* *Amir*.
- 16 *Amir*.
- 17 *Amir*.
- 18 *Tajpur*.
- 19 *Qasim*.
- 20 *Karnapala*.

well as all the military commanders, had connections with him as early as the first year of Sayyid Ahmad Khan's administration.⁴⁴

The above account refers to the period when Mir Jafar became the Nawab in 1757 and indicated that there were direct and revenue linkages to the district. Ashraf Singh was a son of Tipu and owner of jaghirs and other petty landholding zamindars as well in the district. The proprietor of the Khatwa estate in Khatwagunj subdivisions of Purnea, is a descendant of the zamindar of Surguja jaghirs and this estate has been held properly since 1817 by the grant of a sardar.⁴⁵ Pargana Khatwa pur was the property of Raja Ramchandra Roy which was given to him by Safi Khan.⁴⁶ The estates of Ara and Teria Jharkhand were the property of Basanti Singh from 1750 and formerly these belonged to the late Raja Ramchandra Narayan Roy.⁴⁷ During the last days of Mughal rule, there were some 15 zamindars in Purnea.⁴⁸ The Fifth Report indicates that in Purnea there were as many zamindars as there were parganas under its jurisdiction.⁴⁹ Thus it would be wrong to say that there were no zamindars in Purnea. Nawab Sayyid Ahmad Khan punished Mir Jafar, a zamindar of Purnea for his rebellious attitude and mismanagement.⁵⁰ but in 1756 this was restored to the family. All these accounts indicate that a class of zamindars existed in Purnea before 1757.

Shankar Jang, the son-in-law of Purnea refused to obey Saugandhoda when he later desired him to give delivery of possession of Boudgar and woodward Parganas in Purnea to Rasthian, brother of Raja Thakur Ram. As a result of this disagreement, there was war between Saugandhoda and Shankar Jang in which the latter was killed. Safi Khan never went to Murshidabad to

44 Sayyid-ul-Jang, vol. II, pp. 250-251.

45 Bengal District Gazetteer, Purnea, 1901, p. 94.

46 Buchanan, An Account of the District of Purnea, p. 479.

47 Ibid., p. 493.

48 L. N. Asthana, The Economic History of Bengal, vol. II, p. 17.

49 Fifth Report, vol. II, p. 335.

50 Sayyid-ul-Jang, vol. II, p. 42.

51 Ibid., p. 104.

Aliwardi though the latter very much wished it and no action could be taken against Saif Khan for not paying due regard to the wishes of the Subahdar. The simple reason was that Aliwardi wanted to avoid any bad relationship with Saif Khan, grandson of Usurud Mulk Amir Khan, Viceroy of Kabul, and a glorious lord of seven thousand horses. 'To Saiyad Alurud Khan Purua has been given in full sovereignty', wrote Singjuddaula to Aliwardi Khan.³¹ Thus in the pre-Plassey period, we find that Saigdar beginning from Saif Khan to Shandaz Jung, were all connected by ties of friendship or kinship with the nawabs of Bengal and naturally therefore, Purua Saigdar seldom ignored the nawab or the latter did not like to interfere in their affairs but it gave rise to family troubles or intrigues and the affairs of the Saigdar were looked after more or less as private affair.

As regards the system of revenue prevalent one may conclude that standard assessment of Athar was the guiding principle, but afterwards cases were levied by the Provincial Government on the standard assessment details of which have already been given. In 1737 the standard assessment and the abvab in Purua were almost equal as indicated earlier. The zamindars, kharajdars, potwaris and mardals all participated in the collection and administration of land revenue with the Saigdar at the helm of affairs. In Purua, 'the financial operations of the state in discovering the genuine collections made throughout the country, descended no further than the Saigdar.'³² As Purua was a Saigdari district, the zamindars were under the Saigdar and it was enough to check the amount of incomes of the Saigdar which they received from the zamindars. When the zamindars received from the tenants, was never the subject-matter of enquiry before the investigations made by Mir Kasim in 1761. Thus, we have seen above, the exchequer was always deprived of the increase in revenue on account of improvement in the country or extension of territorial jurisdiction.

The one fact that strikes us here is that on the eve of the Divani the conditions regarding revenue assessments and collections had become unsettled.

³¹ *Saf-Masakhara*, vol. II, p. 96.

³² *Pah Report*, vol. II, p. 138.

Both the central and provincial governments had become weak and were on the verge of collapse. The Company at this time was the *de facto* sovereign of Bengal.

As the officers of the Company were all foreigners and at this stage it was their policy to conciliate the people to their newly established government, they decided not to disturb the existing system of revenue administration for the time being. But the East India Company being a commercial concern, was very particular in the realisation of revenue even when occasions warranted remission. On the accession to Diwani, the authorities of the Company found that as a matter of fact, the old system of revenue administration was not working properly. They were also out for political domination of the country and as such it was necessary for them to evolve a system of revenue as well as a system of government suited to the larger interests of the Company. This could not be done all at once and so the authorities decided in favour of a policy of wait and watch and then proceed cautiously on experiments. They tried several methods of revenue collections and ultimately because of the experiences gained in course of years, they headed towards permanency of settlement.

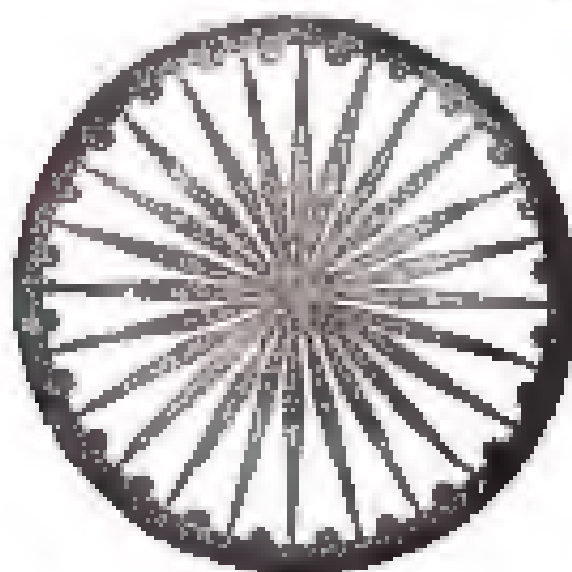
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